

THE Saturday Magazine.

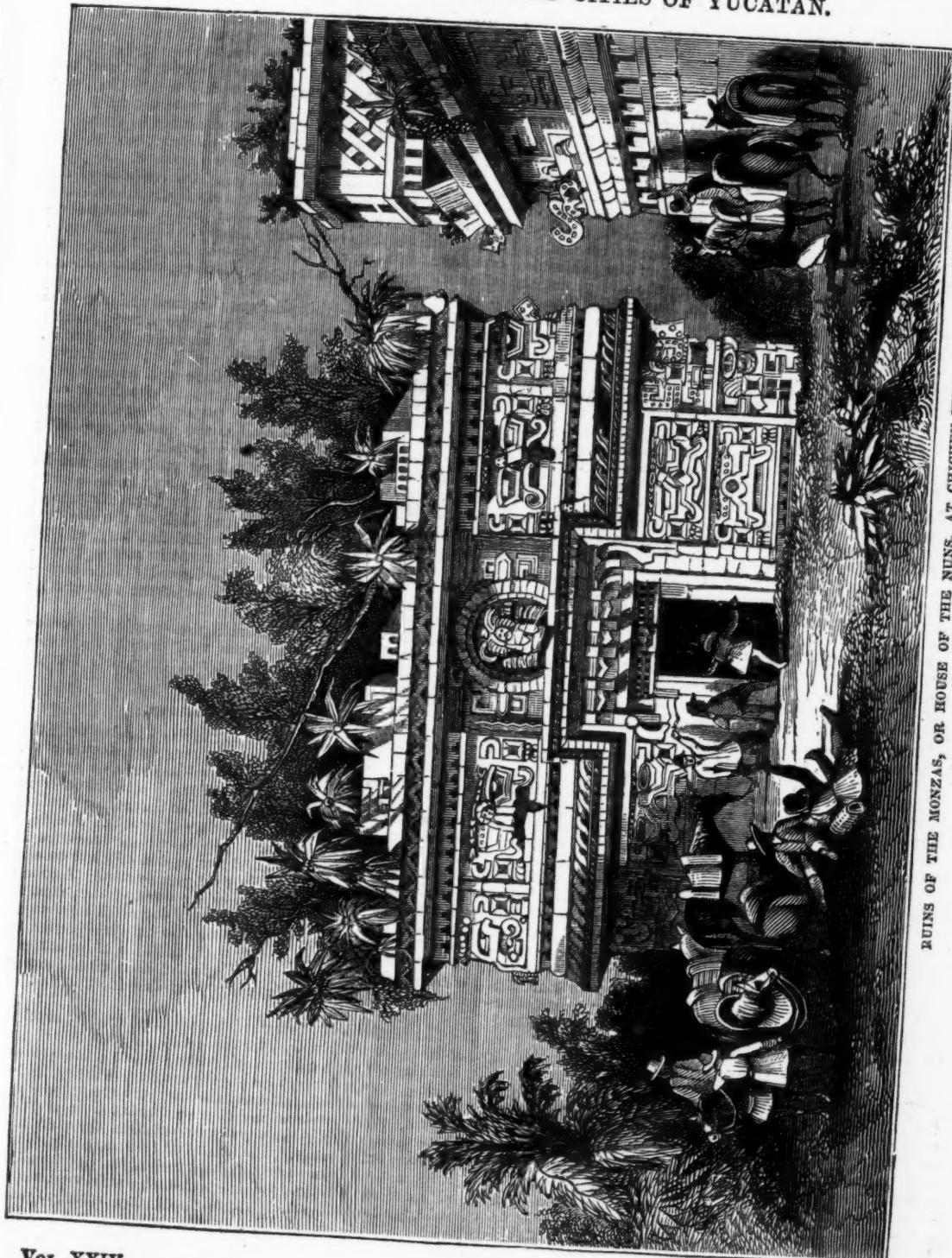
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ACCOUNT OF THE RUINED CITIES OF YUCATAN.



RUINS OF THE MONZAS, OR HOUSE OF THE NUNS, AT CHICHEN-ITZA.

ACCOUNT OF THE RUINED CITIES OF YUCATAN.

II.

Kings pile their domes in air,
That the coiled snake may bask on sculptured stone
And nations clear the forest to prepare
For the wild fox and deer more stately dwellings there!

HEMANS.

Palace and tower on the plain were left,
Like fallen trees by the lightning cleft:
The wild vine mantles the stately square,
The Maya's throne is the serpent's lair,
And the jungle grass o'er the altar springs.—HEMANS.

RUINS OF CHICHEN.

In a foregoing Supplement, at page 33, of the present volume, we commenced a description of the mysterious ruins of Yucatan. We now propose to follow Mr. Stevens, the traveller who has so ably investigated the condition and origin of these remains, to the completion of his last expedition. The reader will remember that we introduced the subject to him, first, with an outline of the discovery of the country by the Spaniards in the sixteenth century. We next collected what particulars are known concerning the modern Mayas, or Indian inhabitants of the peninsula of Yucatan, and, after briefly sketching the five principal cities, Merida, Campeachy, Valladolid, Izamal, and Tekax, we proceeded from these points to explore the ruins of Mayapan, Uxmal, Zayil, Ticul, Kabah, Zabnà, and Labphak.

We propose, now, to leave Valladolid nine miles behind us to the eastward, and pay a visit to the Ruins of Chichen. The first settlement of the Spaniards in the interior of Yucatan was made at Chichen, or Chichen-Itza, as it was called, from the name of the people who then occupied the district. It was here that Don Francisco Montejó, commander of the third expedition, made a fatal mistake; lured by the glitter of gold in another province, he divided his forces, and sent one of his best captains with fifty men in search of it. From that time calamities and dangers pressed upon him; altercations and contests began with the Indians; provisions were withheld, and all that they ate was procured at the price of blood. At length, the Indians determined upon their utter destruction. Immense multitudes surrounded the camp of the Spaniards, hemming them in on all sides. The latter, seeing themselves reduced to the necessity of perishing by hunger, determined to die bravely in the field, and went out to give battle. The most sanguinary fight they had ever been engaged in then took place. The Spaniards fought for their lives, and the Indians to remain masters of their own soil. Masses of the latter were killed, but great slaughter was made among the Spaniards, and, to save the lives of those who remained, Don Francisco retreated to the fortifications.

Unable to hold out there, the Europeans took advantage of a night when the Indians were off their guard; they tied a dog to a bell, putting some food before him, but out of his reach, and then, with great silence, they marched out from the camp. The dog, when he saw them going, pulled the cord in order to go with them, and afterwards to get at the food. The Indians, supposing that the Spaniards were sounding the alarm, remained quiet, waiting the result, but a little before daylight, perceiving that the bell did not cease ringing, drew near the fortification and found it deserted. In the meantime, the Spaniards escaped towards the coast, and in the meagre and disconnected accounts of their dangers, it is, perhaps, not surprising that we have none whatever of the buildings, arts, and sciences, of the fierce inhabitants of Chichen.

THE MONJAS OF CHICHEN.

The Monjas, or House of the Nuns, is conspicuous among the ruins of Chichen-Itza. It is remarkable for its good state of preservation, and the richness and beauty of its ornaments. The engraving at the beginning of this paper will convey some idea of the florid architecture of the American Indian. On the right hand is represented the corner of a building called the Eglésia, or Church. The height of the noble façade which is represented in the body of the wood-engraving is 25 feet, and its width 35 feet. It has two cornices of tasteful and elaborate design. Over the doorway are twenty small compartments of hieroglyphics in four rows, five in a row, and to make room for which

the lower cornice is carried up. Over these stand out in a line six bold projecting curved ornaments, as at Uxmal, resembling elephants' trunks. In the central space over the doorway is an irregular circular niche in which portions of a seated figure with a head-dress of feathers, still remains. The tropical plants and shrubs growing on the roof hang over the cornice like a fringe-work, and add greatly to the picturesque effect of this elegant façade.

"The whole building is composed of two structures entirely different from each other, one of which forms a wing to the principal edifice, and has, at the end, the façade above described. The whole length is 228 feet, and the depth of the principal structure is 112 feet. The only portion containing interior chambers is that which Mr. Stevens calls the wing. The great structure adjoining to the wing is apparently a solid mass of masonry, erected only to hold up the two ranges of buildings upon it. A grand staircase 56 feet wide rises to the top. On one side of the staircase a huge breach, 20 or 30 feet deep, has been made by the proprietor, for the purpose of getting out building-stone; this discloses only solid masonry. The grand staircase is 32 feet high, and has thirty-nine steps. On the top of the structure stands a range of buildings, with a platform of 14 feet in front."

"From the back of this platform the grand staircase rises again fifteen steps to the roof of the second range, which forms a platform in front of the third range; this last is, unfortunately, in a ruined condition, and it is to be observed that in this, as in all other cases, these ancient architects never placed an upper building on the roof of a lower one, but always carried it back, so as to rest it on a structure solid from the ground, the roof of the lower range being merely a platform in front of the upper one.

"The circumference of this building is 638 feet, and its height, when entire, was 65 feet. It seems to have been constructed only with reference to the second range of apartments, upon which the art and skill of the builders have been lavishly expended. It is 104 feet long, and 30 feet wide, and the broad platform around it, although overgrown with grass several feet high, formed a noble promenade, commanding a magnificent view of the surrounding country.

"Detached portions of human figures continually occur among these remains which are well drawn, the heads adorned with plumes of feathers, and the hands bearing shields and spears."

THE CARACOL OF CHICHEN.

Northward from the Monjas of Chichen stands among the ruins an object conspicuous for its picturesque appearance, and unlike any other Mr. Stevens had seen in this country, except one at Mayapan much ruined. It is circular in form, and is known by the name of the Caracol, or winding staircase, on account of its interior arrangements. It stands on the upper of two terraces. The lower one measures in front from north to south 223 feet, and in depth from east to west 150 feet, and is still in good preservation. A grand staircase 45 feet wide, and containing twenty steps, rises to the platform of this terrace. On each side of this staircase, forming a sort of balustrade, were the entwined bodies of two gigantic serpents, 3 feet wide, portions of which are still in place; and among the ruins of the staircase was a gigantic head which had terminated on one side the foot of the steps.

The platform of the second terrace is reached by another staircase 42 feet wide. In the centre of this stands the building, which has four small doorways facing the cardinal points. The height, including the terraces, is little short of 60 feet, and, when entire, even among the great buildings around, this structure must have presented a striking appearance. The doorways give entrance to a circular corridor 5 feet wide. The inner wall has also four doorways, smaller than the others, and standing at intermediate points of the compass, facing north-east, north-west, south-west, and south-east. These doors give entrance to a second circular corridor, 4 feet wide, and in the centre is a circular mass apparently of solid stone; but at one place, at the height of 8 feet from the ground, was observed a small square opening choked up with stones. The walls of

both corridors are plastered and ornamented with paintings. The plan of the building was new, but, instead of unfolding secrets, it drew closer the curtain that already shrouded, with most impenetrable folds, these mysterious structures.

THE GYMNASIUM.

Among the ruins of Chichen-Itza is to be seen the following extraordinary edifice; namely, two immense parallel walls, each 274 feet long, 30 feet thick, and 120 feet apart. One hundred feet from the northern extremity, facing the open space between the walls, stands on an elevation a building 35 feet long, containing a single chamber, with the front fallen, and, rising among the rubbish, the remains of two columns, elaborately ornamented with sculpture. The whole interior wall is covered from the floor to the peak of the arch with sculptured figures in bas-relief, much worn and faded.

In the centre of the great stone walls, exactly opposite each other, and at the height of 20 feet from the ground, are two massive stone rings, 4 feet in diameter, and 1 foot 1 inch thick; the diameter of the hole is 1 foot 7 inches. On the rim and border were two sculptured entwined serpents. The parallel structures supporting the rings were probably intended for the celebration of some public games. The following account of the diversions of Montezuma, (the Emperor of Mexico at the time of its conquest,) is given by Herrera, and illustrates these remains.

"The king took much delight in seeing sport at ball, which the Spaniards have since prohibited, because of the mischief that often happened at it, and was by them called *Tlachtli*, being like our tennis. The ball was made of the gum of a tree that grows in hot countries, which, having holes made in it, distil great drops, that soon harden, and being worked and moulded together, turn as black as pitch*. The balls made thereof, tho' hard and heavy to the hand, did bound and fly as well as our foot-balls; nor did they use chases, but vy'd to drive the adverse party that is to hit the wall, the others were to make good, or strike it over. They struck it with any part of their body, as it hapned, or they could most conveniently; and sometimes he lost that touched it with any other part but his hip, which was looked upon among them as the greatest dexterity; and to this effect, that the ball might rebound the better, they fastned a piece of stiff leather on their hips. They play'd in parties, so many on a side, for a load of mantles, or what the gamesters could afford, at so many scores. They also play'd for gold, and feather-work, and sometimes play'd themselves away, as has been said before. The place where they play'd was a ground-room, long, narrow, and high, but wider above than below, and higher on the sides than at the ends, and they kept it very well plaster'd and smooth, both the walls and the floor. *On the side walls they fix'd certain stones, like those of a mill, with a hole quite through the middle, just as big as the ball, and he that could strike it through there won the game.* And in token of its being an extraordinary success, which rarely hapned, he had a right to the cloaks of all the lookers-on, by ancient custom, and law amongst gamesters; and it was very pleasant to see, that as soon as ever the ball was in the hole, the standers-by took to their heels, running away with all their might to save their cloaks, laughing and rejoicing, others scouring after them to secure their cloaks for the winner, who was oblig'd to offer some sacrifice to the Idol of the Tennis-court, and the stone through whose hole the ball had pass'd. Every tennis-court was a Temple, having two Idols, the one of Gaming, and the other of the ball. On a lucky day, at midnight, they perform'd certain ceremonies and enchantments on the two inner walls, and on the midst of the floor, singing certain songs, or ballads; after which priest of the great temple went with some of the religious men to bless it; he uttered some words, threw the ball about the tennis-court four times, and then it was consecrated, and might be play'd in, but not before. The owner of the tennis-court, who was always a lord, never play'd without making some offering and performing certain ceremonies to the idol of gaming, which shows how superstitious they were, since they had such regard to their idols, even in their diversions. Montezuma carry'd the Spaniards to this sport, and was well pleas'd to see them play at it, as also at cards and dice."

With some slight variation in detail, the general features are so identical as to leave no doubt on the mind that the so-called *Gymnasium* of Chichen was erected for precisely

* Undoubtedly caoutchouc, or India-rubber.

the same object as the Tennis-court in the city of Mexico, as thus described by Herrera. The temples are at hand in which sacrifices were offered, and we discover in this, something more important than the mere determining of the character of a building; for in the similarity of diversions we see a resemblance in manners and institutions, and trace an affinity between the people who erected the ruined cities of Yucatan, and those who inhabited Mexico at the time of the conquest.

SCULPTURES AND PAINTINGS.

At the southern extremity of the eastern wall of the Gymnasium of Chichen are the remains of two ranges of building, one of which is in a state of good preservation, simple and tasteful in its arrangement of ornaments. Under an upper cornice is sculptured a procession of tigers or lynxes. From its lofty position, with trees growing around it and on the roof, the effect is beautifully picturesque; but, upon other considerations, it may be considered one of the most interesting structures in Yucatan.

The range which is in the most ruinous condition contains two broken columns covered with sculptured figures. The front wall had fallen, and exposed the interior of a chamber covered from one end to the other with elaborately sculptured figures in bas-relief. Exposed for ages to a long succession of winds and rains, the characters were faded and worn. The head-dress of the human figures is, as usual amongst the ruins of the country, a plume of feathers, and in the upper row each person carries a bundle of spears, or a quiver of arrows. All these representations were painted.

In the most perfect building, of the two above-mentioned, Mr. Stevens found what he considers the greatest gem of aboriginal art that he met with during his investigations. The steps, or other means of access to this structure, were destroyed, and it was only reached by clambering over promiscuous heaps of ruins. The door opens upon the platform of the wall which overlooks the Tennis-court, or Gymnasium. The front corridor was supported by massive pillars, portions of which still remain covered with elaborate sculptured ornaments. The lintel of the inner doorway is richly carved. Entering an inner chamber, its walls and ceiling are found to be covered, from the floor to the peak of the arch with designs in painting, representing, in brilliant colours, human figures, battles, houses, trees, and scenes of domestic life. On one spot was the conspicuous drawing of a large canoe, but the whole is much disfigured. In some places the plaster is broken off: while in others wilful injury had evidently been done to these remains. The colours were green, yellow, red, blue, and a reddish-brown, the last being invariably the colour given to human flesh. The outlines exhibit a freedom of drawing which could only be the result of discipline and training under masters. "But they have a higher interest than any that attaches to them as mere specimens of art; for among them are seen designs and figures which call forcibly to mind the well-known picture-writings of the Mexicans; and if these analogies are sustained by future observations, this building attached to the walls of the Tennis-court stands an unimpeachable witness that the people who inhabited Mexico, at the time of the conquest, belonged to the same great race which furnished the builders of the ruined cities in Yucatan."—STEVENS.

At Kewick, which lies a little southward of Zabnà, Mr. Stevens had observed a curious painting of a rude human figure surrounded by hieroglyphics, which doubtless contain the whole of its story. The colours were bright; red and green predominating. The painting covered the whole surface of a stone, which, however, occupied a very obscure corner of a building. The apartment in which it was found had nothing to distinguish it from others, and why this particular stone was so adorned our traveller was unable to discover. Nearly every other house at Kewick had fallen. "One long ornamented façade lay on the ground cracked and doubled up, as if shaken off by the vibrations of an earthquake, and still struggling to retain its upright position, the whole presenting a most picturesque and imposing scene of ruins, and conveying to the mind a strong image of the besom of destruction sweeping over a city."

There is an arch near Xul, which place is not far north-east of Kewick, that had been plastered and covered inside with painted figures in profile. These are now much mutilated, but the remaining traces remind one of the funeral processions on the walls of the tombs at Thebes, in Egypt. This arch had once formed the sides and walls of a

chamber, and on the wall which still closes it at one end, Mr. Stevens observed the representations of human figures in colours, some having their heads adorned with plumes, others with a sort of steeple cap, and carrying on their heads something like a basket. Two of them were standing on their hands with their heels in the air. These figures were about a foot in height, and painted red. The drawing was good, and the attitudes spirited and life-like. "Another apartment had been plastered and covered with paintings, the colours of which were in some places still vivid. Here we cornered and killed a snake five feet long, and as I threw it out at the door a strong picture rose up before me of the terrific scenes which must have been enacted in this region; the cries of woe which must have ascended to Heaven when these sculptured and painted edifices were abandoned to become the dwelling-place of vultures and serpents."—STEVENS.

THE CASTILLO OF CHICHEN.

At a distance of 500 feet from the painted chamber at Chichen rises the Castillo, the grandest object that towers above the plain. Every Sunday its ruins are resorted to by the neighbouring villagers, and nothing can surpass the picturesque appearance of this lofty building, while women, dressed in white, with red shawls, are moving along the platform, and passing over its broken thresholds. The mound measures at the base, on the north and south sides, 197 feet, and on the east and west sides, 202 feet. "It does not exactly face the cardinal points, though probably so intended; and in all the buildings, from some cause not easily accounted for, while one varies 10° one way, that immediately adjoining varies 12° or 13° in another. It is built up apparently solid from the plain to the height of 75 feet. On the west side is a staircase 35 feet wide, and on the north is another staircase 44 feet in width, which contains ninety steps. On the ground, at the foot of this staircase, forming a bold, striking, and well-conceived commencement to this lofty range, are two colossal serpents' heads, 10 feet in length, with mouths wide open, and tongues protruding. No doubt they were emblematic of some religious belief, and in the minds of an imaginative people, passing between them to ascend the steps, must have excited feelings of solemn awe."

The platform on the top measures 61 feet from north to south, and 64 from east to west. The building which surmounts it is 43 feet by 49; it has single doorways, facing the east, south, and west, with massive lintels covered with elaborate carvings, and the jambs are ornamented with sculptured figures. The sculpture is much worn, but a head-dress with a plume of feathers, and other portions of rich attire, are still distinct. The face, also, is well-preserved, and possesses a dignified appearance. It has ear-rings, and the nose is bored, which, according to historical accounts, was so prevalent a custom in Yucatan, that long after the conquest the Spaniards passed laws for its prohibition.

All the other jambs are decorated with sculpture of the same general character, and open into a corridor extending round three sides of the building. The doorway which faces the north presents the grandest appearance. It is 20 feet wide, and is supported by two short massive columns entirely covered with elaborate sculpture. This doorway gives access to a corridor which leads to an apartment 17 feet high. Within the chamber are two square pillars (see the engraving of this interior) 9 feet 4 inches high, having sculptured figures on all their sides, and supporting massive sapote beams covered with carving of curious and intricate designs. These were so defaced and time-worn, that, in the obscurity of the room, lighted only from the door, it was difficult to make out what subjects they represented.

Stepping out upon the platform, an immense field of ruins is displayed, and here Mr. Stevens saw, for the first time, groups of small columns, which, on examination, proved to be among the most remarkable and unintelligible of the remains. These stand in rows of three, four, and five abreast; they are very low, many of them only 8 feet high, while the highest were not more than 6 feet, and consisted of several separate pieces, like millstones. Many of them had fallen, and in some places they lie prostrate in rows, all in the same direction, as if thrown down by some force, like that of an earthquake, coming from a given point. In some places they extended to the bases of large mounds, on which were ruins of buildings and colossal fragments of sculpture, while in others they branched off and terminated abruptly. Mr. Stevens caused them to be cleared from

trees, and counted three hundred and eighty, and there were many more. They were too low to have supported a roof under which persons could walk. The idea at times presented itself that they had upheld a raised walk of cement, but there were no remains visible. They inclose an area nearly 400 feet square; and, incomprehensible as they are with regard to their uses and object, add largely to the interest and wonder connected with these ruins.

The ruins of Chichen are situated upon a plain of several miles in circumference, nearly in the centre of Yucatan, upwards of 100 miles from the sea, and remote from all water-communication. The buildings which are in the most perfect state of preservation are the Monjas, the Caracol, Gymnasium, and Castillo, all above described. These, and other erections, were raised upon foundations of rubble, imbedded in mortar, and held together by finished walls of fine concrete-limestone. The walls of the buildings rise perpendicularly, generally to one-half, where they are interrupted by entablatures; above which, to the cornice, the façades are divided into compartments, elaborately ornamented with sculptured stone-work over a diamond lattice-ground, illustrated with hieroglyphics. The whole is interspersed with chaste and unique borders, executed with the greatest possible skill and precision. The stones are cut, in general, about 12 inches in length, and 6 in breadth; the interstices being filled up with the same material that forms the foundation and terraces, namely, rubble, imbedded in mortar.

"The height of these buildings is, for the most part, 20, and rarely above 25 feet. They are limited almost universally to one story, are long and narrow, without windows, receiving no other light than that which passes through the doorway. The ceilings are built in the form of an acute-angled arch by layers of flat stones, the edges being bevelled, and carried up to the apex, upon which rests a stone that serves as a key.

"The interior of some of the most important rooms is finished with a beautiful white composition laid on with the greatest skill. The floors are covered with a hard cement, which shows marks of wear. The doorways are nearly a square of about seven feet, somewhat resembling the Egyptian; the sides of which are formed of large blocks of hewn stone. Stone rings, and holes at the sides of the doorways, indicate that doors once swung upon them."—NORMAN.

The words Chi-chen signify the mouths of wells, in allusion to two natural springs which are still to be recognised in the vicinity.

PAVED ROADS.

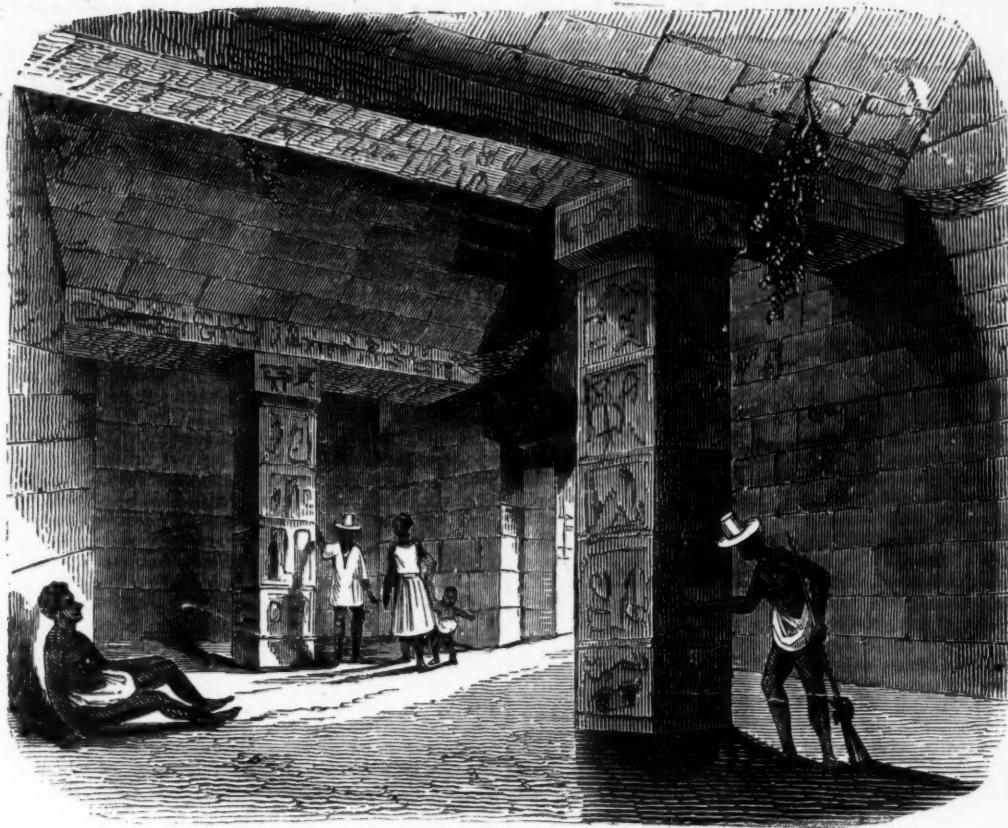
One of the most interesting monuments of the ancient civilization of Yucatan lies near the city of Uxmal. It is a broken platform or road of stone, about 8 feet wide, and 8 or 10 inches high, crossing the modern road, and running off into the woods on both sides. It is called by the Indians, Sacbey, which means, in the Maya language, a paved road of white stone. The Indians say it traversed the country from Kabah to Uxmal, and that on it couriers travelled, bearing letters to and from the lords of those cities, written on leaves or the bark of trees. It is also said that there is a *calzada*, or paved road, of 10 or 12 yards in width, running to the south-east from near Chemax, in the district of Valladolid; but the truth of this report Mr. Stevens had no opportunity of confirming.

COZUMEL.

Is a desolate island, 30 miles long, lying upon the eastern shore of Yucatan, and so bound with coral reefs, that there are only certain places where it is practicable for a boat to land. On the outer reef Mr. Stevens saw the wreck of a brig, her naked ribs above water, and the fate of her mariners no one knew.

The native name of the island is Cuzamil, signifying the Island of Swallows. It was discovered accidentally in 1518 by Juan de Grijalva. The following are extracts from the itinerary of his voyage, kept by the chaplain-in-chief of the fleet.

"We came near the shore of Cuzamil, which we coasted; the sea is very deep upon the borders. The country appeared very agreeable. We counted fourteen towers. At sunset we saw a large white tower which appeared very high. We approached, and saw near it a multitude of Indians, men and women, who were looking at us, and remained until the fleet stopped within musket-shot of the



INTERIOR OF THE CASTILLO, CHICHEN-ITZA.

tower. The Indians, who are very numerous in this island, made a great noise with their drums.

"One hundred men embarked in the boats, and landed. They were accompanied by a priest, and expected to be attacked by a great number of Indians. They came to the tower, where they found no one. The ascent was by eighteen steps, the base was very massive and 180 feet in circumference. On the top rose a small tower of the height of two men placed one upon the other. Within were figures, bones, and idols that they adored. When the commandant was at the top of the tower with many of our people, an Indian, followed by three others, who kept the doors, put in the interior a vase of very odorous perfumes, which seemed of storax. This Indian was old; he burned many perfumes before the idols which were in the tower, and sang in a loud voice a song, which was always in the same tone. We supposed that he was invoking his idols.

"These Indians carried our commandant with ten or twelve Spaniards, and gave them to eat in a hall constructed of stones very close together, and covered with straw. Before the hall was a large well, from which everybody drank. They then left us alone, and we entered the village, where all the houses were built of stone. Among others, we saw five very well made, and commanded by small towers. The base of these edifices is very large and massive; the building is very small at the top. They appeared to have been built a long time, but there are also modern ones.

"The village, or bourg, was paved with stones. The streets, elevated at the sides, descended, inclining towards the middle, which was paved entirely with large stones. The sides were occupied by the houses of the inhabitants. They are constructed of stone from the foundation to half the height of the walls, and covered with straw. To judge by the edifices and houses, these Indians appear to be very ingenious; and if we had not seen a number of recent constructions, we should have thought that these buildings were the works of the Spaniards."

In February, 1519, the armament of Cortez rendezvoused at this island. An eye-witness, Bernal Dias, says, "There was on the island of Cozumel a temple containing some hideous idols, to which all the Indians of the neighbouring

districts used to go frequently in solemn procession. One morning the courts of this temple were filled with Indians, and curiosity having also drawn many of us thither, we found them burning odoriferous resins like our incense, and shortly after an old man in a large loose mantle ascended to the top of the temple, and harangued the multitude for a considerable time. Cortez, who was present, at length called an interpreter, to question him concerning the evil doctrines which the old man was delivering. He then summoned all the caciques and chief persons to come before him, and, as well as he could, by signs and interpretations, explained to them that the idols which they worshipped were not gods, but evil things, which would draw their souls down to hell, and that if they wished to remain in brotherly connexion with us, they must pull them down, and place in their stead the crucifix of our Lord, by whose assistance they would obtain good harvests and the salvation of their souls, with many other good and holy reasons which he expressed very well. The priests and chiefs replied that they worshipped these gods as their ancestors had done, because they were kind to them, and that if we attempted to molest them, the gods would convince us of their power by destroying us in the sea. Cortez then ordered the idols to be prostrated, which we immediately did, rolling them down many steps. He next sent for lime, of which there was abundance in the place, and Indian masons, by whom, under our direction, a very handsome altar was constructed, whereon we placed an image of the Holy Virgin, and the carpenters having made a crucifix, which was erected in a small chapel close to the altar, mass was said by the reverend father Juan Dias, and listened to by the priests, chiefs, and the rest of the natives with great attention."

Later historians are more explicit, and speak of Cozumel as a place containing many adoratories and temples, as a principal sanctuary and place of pilgrimage, standing to Yucatan in the same relation as Rome to Papal countries.

These accounts induced Mr. Stevens to visit Cozumel. He found that amid all the devastations which attended the progress of the Spaniards in America, none is more complete than that which has swept over this island. He discovered it to be entirely uninhabited, and so overgrown

with trees, that except along the shore, or around some deserted hut, it was impossible to move in any direction without cutting a path. About 200 feet distant from the sea some vestiges of the ancient population first attracted observation. The ruin stands on a terrace, and has steps on all four of its sides. It measures 16 feet square; it had four doors facing the cardinal points. The exterior is of plain stone, but was formerly stuccoed and painted. The doorways open into a narrow corridor only 20 inches wide, which encompasses a small room 8½ feet long, and 5 feet wide. South-south-east from this stands another small building, of the same general character, and these were the only structures that were discovered. The "towers" seen by Grijalva and his companions, as they sailed along the coast, were evidently the same kind of edifices as are here described by Mr. Stevens.

THE RUINS OF TULOOM

Stand upon the eastern shore of Yucatan, nearly opposite the island of Cozumel. Amid the wildest scenery, upon the natural pediment of a cliff, heightened by art with a gigantic but ruined staircase, is placed the Castillo. The steps, the platform of the building, and the whole area in front are overgrown with trees, the deep green foliage, and the mysterious edifices around, present an image of a grove, sacred to Druidical worship. To the exciting interest of a ruined city was added the magnificence of nature. The platform of the Castillo looks over an immense forest, and beyond the postern wall is spread the boundless ocean. Looking down from the cliff in fair weather and clear water, large fish, eight and ten feet long, may be seen gliding quietly in the depths below.

"No words can convey the solemnity of the scene when the traveller's axe first broke the stillness that had so long prevailed around. The building, including the wings, measures at its base 100 feet in length. The grand staircase is 30 feet wide, with 24 steps, and a substantial balustrade on each side, still in good preservation, gives it an unusually imposing character. The doorway is obstructed with the gnarled roots of a lofty tree.

"The wings are much lower than the principal building. The columns in the doorways are ornamented with devices in stucco, one of which seemed a masked face, and the other the head of a rabbit.

"The back or sea-wall of the Castillo rises on the brink of a high, broken, and precipitous cliff, commanding a magnificent ocean view, and a picturesque line of coast, being itself visible from a great distance at sea. The wall is solid, and has no doorways or entrances of any kind, nor even a platform around it.

"At evening, when the work of the day was ended, and our men returned to the hut, we sat down on the moulding of the wall, and regretted that the doorways of our lofty habitation had not opened upon the sea. Night, however, wrought a great change in our feelings. An easterly storm came on, and the rain beat heavily against the sea-wall. We were obliged to stop up the oblong openings that admitted air, and congratulated ourselves upon the wisdom of the ancient builders. The darkness, the howlings of the winds, and cracking of branches in the forest, and the dashing of angry waves against the cliff, gave a romantic interest to our occupation of this desolate dwelling."—**STEVENS.**

The forest-buried city of Tuloom was encompassed by a wall, which has resisted all the elements of destruction at work upon it, and is still erect and in good preservation. This massive stone structure is in the strictest sense a city wall, forming a parallelogram abutting on the sea, the high precipitous cliff constituting an impregnable sea-wall, 1500 feet in length. Trees growing beside the wall have thrown their branches across it; thorns, bushes, and vines of every description grow out of it, and the sharp spikes of the *Agave Americana*, or common American aloe, offer formidable barriers to the investigator. Rough, flat stones were laid upon each other without mortar or cement of any kind, which form a wall varying in thickness from 8 to 13 feet. The south side has two gateways, each about 5 feet wide.

"At the distance of 650 feet the wall turns at right angles, and runs parallel to the sea. At the angle is a watch-tower, elevated so as to give a commanding view, and reached by ascending a few steps. It is 12 feet square, and has two doorways. The interior is plain, and against the back wall is a small altar, at which the guard might offer up prayers for the preservation of the city. But no guard sits in

the watch-tower now, trees are growing around it; within the walls the city is desolate and overgrown, and without is an unbroken forest. The battlements, on which the proud Indian strode with his bow and arrows, and plumes of feathers, are surmounted by immense thorn bushes and overrun by poisonous vines. The city no longer keeps watch; the fiat of destruction has gone out against it, and in solitude it rests, the abode of silence and desolation."

It is Mr. Stevens' firm belief that the city of Tuloom continued to be occupied by its aboriginal inhabitants long after the conquest. The strong impression of a comparatively very recent occupation is derived from the appearance of the buildings themselves, which, though not less ruined, owing to the ranker growth of trees, have in some instances an appearance of freshness and good keeping that, amid the desolation and solitude around, was almost startling.

THE CITY OF IZAMAL

Is situated between Merida and Valladolid, 15 leagues from the former place. It was formerly considered only as a village; but has lately been raised into the rank of a city. There is, however, nothing of modern date to detain the eye from immense mounds of ancient construction that rise grandly above the tops of the houses. From these mounds the whole city, as it now stands, has been built, without seeming to diminish their colossal proportions, proclaiming the power of those who reared them, and destined, apparently, to stand when the feebler structures of their more civilized conquerors shall have crumbled into dust.

One of these mounds, about 200 feet long, and 30 feet high, appeared to have had its vast sides covered from one end to the other with colossal ornaments in stucco, most of which had fallen, but amongst the fragments may be seen a gigantic human head, nearly 8 feet high, and 7 feet in width. A stone, 1½ feet long, protrudes from the chin, intended, perhaps, for burning copal on, as a sort of altar. In sternness and harshness of expression, it reminded Mr. Stevens of the idols of Copan, drawings of which may be seen in the *Saturday Magazine*, Vol. XXI., pages 81 and 85, together with descriptions of these and other relics of Central America and Mexico. The immense proportions of that at Izamal correspond with the dimensions of the mound, and give an unusual impression of grandeur to the beholder.

Two or three streets distant from the plaza, or square, but visible in its gigantic features, is the most stupendous mound that Mr. Stevens had yet seen in Yucatan. It measured between 600 and 700 feet long, 60 feet high, and had, beyond all doubt, interior chambers.

"Turning from these memorials of former power to the depressed race that now lingers around them, the stranger might run wild with speculation and conjecture, but on the north side of the plaza is a monument that recalls his roving thoughts, and holds up to his gaze a leaf in history. It is the great church and convent of Franciscan monks, standing on an elevation, and giving a character to the plaza which no other in Yucatan possesses. Two flights of stone steps lead up to it, and the area upon which they open is probably 200 feet square; on three sides is a colonnade, forming a noble promenade, overlooking the city and the surrounding country to a great distance. This great elevation was evidently artificial, and not the work of the Spaniards."

At the earliest period of the conquest we have accounts of the large aboriginal town of Izamal. In 1553, the padre Fr. Diego de Landa was elected guardian of the convent of Izamal, and charged to erect the building, the monks having lived until that time in houses of straw. He selected as the place for the foundation one of the cerros, or mounds, which then existed, "made by hand," and called by the natives, Phappholchac, "which," says the Padre Lizana, "signifies the habitation or residence of the priests of the gods. The place in which the priests of the idol lived, and which had been the place of abomination and idolatry, was selected that it might become the place of sanctification, where the ministers of the true God should offer sacrifices and adoration due to his Divine Majesty."

This testimony proves beyond a doubt that these great mounds had been temples and idols, and the habitations of priests, in the actual use of the Indians who were found occupying the country at the time of the conquest; and dispels much of the mystery that hangs over the ruins of the country.

AKÉ.

The ruins of Aké are situated 9 leagues from Merida. A

great mound, called El Palacio, or the Palace, is worthy of attention amidst so many structures of the same character abounding in Yucatan. The ascent is on the south side, by an immense staircase, 137 feet wide, forming an approach of rude grandeur, perhaps equal to any that ever existed in the country. Each step is 4 feet 5 inches deep, and 1 foot 5 inches in height. The platform on the top is 225 feet in length, and 50 in breadth. On this great platform stand thirty-six shafts of columns in three parallel rows of twelve, about 10 feet apart from north to south, and 15 from east to west. There are no remains of any structure, or of a roof.

In the same vicinity are other mounds of colossal dimensions, one of which is also called the Palace, but of a different construction and without pillars. On another, at the head of a ruined staircase, is an opening under the top of a doorway, nearly filled up, leading into a dark chamber of rude construction, and of which some of the stones in the wall measured 7 feet in length. This is called Akabna, Casa Obscura, or dark house. Near this are steps leading down to a spring of water, which once supplied the ancient city. The ruins cover a large extent, but all are overgrown, and in a condition too ruinous to be presented in a drawing. They are ruder and more massive than any of the others above described, and bear the stamp of an older era. But it is most probable that the city was inhabited at the time of the conquest. In the year 1527, before the battle of Chichen, the Spaniards, under Don Francisco Montejo, had reached a place called Aké, where they found themselves confronted with a vast multitude of armed Indians. A desperate battle ensued, which lasted two days, and in which the Spaniards gained no easy triumph. There is no reason to doubt that the place now named Aké is identical with the scene of this battle.

PATHS FOR TRAVELLERS.

Parts of Yucatan offer untrdden fields to the undaunted traveller. The whole triangular region from Valladolid to the Bay of Ascension on one side, and the port of Yalahao on the other, is not traversed by a single road. It is a region entirely unknown; no white man ever enters it. It is Mr. Stevens' belief that within this region cities like those which are now in ruins in other parts of the country were kept up and occupied for a long time, perhaps one or two centuries, after the conquest, and that, down to a comparatively late period, Indians were living in them, the same as before the discovery of America. "In fact, I conceive it not to be impossible that within this secluded region may exist at this day, unknown to white men, a living aboriginal city, occupied by relics of the ancient race, who still worship in the temples of their fathers."

"There is a district of country situated between Guatemala, Yucatan, and Chiapas, that has never yet been subdued. This section is surrounded by mountains, and is said to be inaccessible, except by one way, and that not generally known. No one yet, who has had the boldness to follow the inhabitants to their wild retreat, has ever returned to render an account of their journey. The inhabitants are represented as speaking the Maya and the Tcholo languages, and many of them as conversing well in Spanish. From the latter circumstance they are enabled to visit the nearest cities, sell their tobacco, the principal article they cultivate, and afterwards to return to their retreats. They are constituted of the Lacandones, and other savage tribes; are expert warriors, remarkably athletic, and very cruel. They are worshippers of idols, and their religious ceremonies are said to have undergone little or no change."

"Palenque is in the neighbourhood of this settlement, the population of which is estimated at thirty thousand; their secluded manner of life renders it almost impossible to arrive at any correct impressions respecting them. The Indians of Yucatan that have held conversation with persons from this district are unable to give any information about the people. Could a friendly intercourse, by any possibility, be established with this surprising country, there is scarcely a doubt that a knowledge of the former inhabitants of the immense ruins scattered throughout the neighbouring provinces would be revealed. That their temples and records remain in safety, and are capable of speaking to posterity, there can scarcely be a question."—NORMAN.

Beyond the village of Iturbide, which formed the most southern point of Mr. Stevens' last expedition, is a wilderness stretching off to the Lake of Peten and that region of Lacandones, or unbaptized Indians, just now referred to. "In this lake are numerous islands, one of which is called

Peten Grande, Peten itself being a Maya word, signifying an island. It now belongs to the government of Guatemala, and is under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the bishop of Yucatan. Formerly it was the principal place of the province of Itza, which province, for one hundred and fifty years after the subjugation of Yucatan, maintained its fierce and native independence. In the year 1608, sixty-six years after the conquest, two Franciscan monks, alone, without arms, and in the spirit of peace, set out to conquer this province by converting the natives to Christianity." After a dangerous journey they landed on the island, and were provided with a house by the king. They forthwith preached to the Indians, who said that the time was not yet come for them to become Christians, and advised the monks to go and return some other day. Nevertheless, they carried them round the town, and in the middle of one of the temples the monks saw a great idol of the figure of a horse, which evidences the miserable weakness of the unassisted, unenlightened human mind. It was intended as an image of the horse which Cortez left at that place on his great journey from Mexico to Honduras. On that occasion the Indians had seen the Spaniards fire their muskets from the backs of the horses, and supposing that the fire and noise were caused by the animals, they called the image Tzimin Chac, and *adored it as the god of thunder and lightning*. One of the monks, carried away by zealous fervour, seized the foot of the horse with his hand, mounted upon the statue, and broke it in pieces.

The king saved the lives of the daring missionaries from the vengeance of a superstitious people; but obliged them to leave the island. In 1619, the same monks, undaunted by their previous ill-success, returned; but the people rose up against them, and barely suffered them to escape in a canoe with their lives. "With all their fanaticism and occasional cruelty, there is something soul-stirring in the devotion of these early monks to the business of converting the souls of the Indians."

In 1695, the governor of Yucatan undertook the great work of opening a road across the whole continent from Campeachy to Guatemala. This led to the conquest of Itza. Don Martin Ursua, the governor, took the command of the expedition in person. He left Campeachy in January 1697, and sent before him proclamation, giving notice that the time had come when they should have one cup and one plate with the Spaniards. "If not," says the proclamation, "I will do what the king commands me, but which it is not necessary now to express." The Indians, however, withheld the power of the invader, but the spear was no defence against the musket, and the island of Peten Grande displayed the Spanish standard. This took place one hundred and fifty-five years after the foundation of the city of Merida, and but one hundred and forty-nine years ago. The monks found "twelve or more adoratorios of the heathen idols, of the size of the largest churches, in the villages of the Indians in the province of Yucatan, each one of which was capable of containing more than one thousand persons." In their private houses, even on the benches on which they sat, were found small idols. The principal temple was of a square form, with handsome breastwork, and is mentioned as having been built like a Castillo; such, probably, as those at Chichen and Tuloom, above described.

It is said that the people of Itza came originally from the land of Maya, now Yucatan. At the time of the insurrection of the Caciques of Maya, and the destruction of the native capital of Mayapan, which, according to tradition, took place about one hundred years before the arrival of the Spaniards, Canek, one of the rebellious caciques, got possession of the city of Chichen-Itza. From thence he withdrew to the most hidden and impenetrable part of the mountains, and took possession of the lake of Peten, establishing his residence on the large island which now bears that name. It follows, therefore, that the adoratorios and temples which Don Martin Ursua found on the island must have been erected within that time. This is an interesting fact, that only one hundred and forty-nine years ago, a city existed occupied by unbaptized Indians, precisely in the same state as before the arrival of the Spaniards, having temples resembling the great structures now scattered in ruins over Yucatan.

"And where are these temples and adoratorios? Where are the Indians whose heads, on that day of carnage and terror, covered the water from the island to the main? Where are those unhappy fugitives, and the inhabitants of the other islands, and of the territory of Itza? They fled before the terrible Spaniard, plunged deeper into

the wilderness, and are dimly connected in my mind with that mysterious city before referred to. In fact, it is not difficult for me to believe that in the wild region beyond the lake of Peten never yet penetrated by a white man, Indians are now living as they did before the discovery of America; and it is almost a part of this belief that they are using and occupying adoratorios and temples like those now seen in ruins in the wilderness of Yucatan."—STEVENS.

CONCLUSION.

From the history of Peten Grande, from the memorials of the church of Izamal, as well as from the good preservation of the forest-buried city of Tuloom, besides other proofs that have been noticed in the foregoing papers, it decidedly appears that there are no grounds for ascribing any high antiquity to the ruins of Yucatan. These desolate cities, were not, of course, all built at the same time, but are the remains of different, although comparatively modern, epochs. We are not justified in going back to any nation of the Old World for their builders. Nor are they the works of a people that have entirely passed away, and whose history is lost. On the contrary there is every reason to believe them to be the labours of the same races who inhabited the country at the time of the Spanish conquest, or of some not very remote progenitors.

The entire absence of all local traditions respecting the age and uses of the several structures may be accounted for by the unparalleled circumstances which attended the conquest and subjugation of Spanish America.

Every captain, or discoverer, on first planting the royal standard on the shores of a new country, made proclamation according to a form drawn up by the most eminent divines and lawyers in Spain, the most extraordinary that ever appeared in the history of mankind; entreating and requiring the inhabitants to acknowledge and obey the Church as the superior and guide of the universe, the holy father called the Pope, and his Majesty as king and sovereign lord of these islands, and of the *terra firma*; and concluding, "But if you will not comply, or maliciously delay to obey my injunction, then, with the help of God, I will enter your country by force; I will carry on war against you with the utmost violence; I will subject you to the yoke of obedience to the Church and King; I will take your wives and children and make them slaves, and sell or dispose of them according to his majesty's pleasure. I will seize your goods, and do you all the mischief in my power, as rebellious subjects, who will not acknowledge or submit to their lawful sovereign; and I protest that all the bloodshed and calamities which shall follow are to be imputed to you, and not to his Majesty, or to me, or the gentlemen who serve under me."

"The conquest and subjugation of the country were carried out in the unscrupulous spirit of this proclamation. The pages of the historians are dyed with blood; and sailing on the crimson stream, with a master pilot at the helm, appears the leading, stern, and steady policy of the Spaniards, surer and more fatal than the sword, to subvert all the institutions of the natives and break up and utterly destroy all the rites, customs, and associations that might keep alive the memory of their fathers, and their ancient condition."

"Who these people were, whence they came, and who were their progenitors, are questions which involve many considerations, and the dim light which history shed upon them may be summed up in a few words.

"According to traditions, picture-writings, and Mexican manuscripts written after the conquest, the Toltecs, or Toltecans, were the first inhabitants of the land of Anahuac, now known as New Spain or Mexico, and they are the oldest nations on the continent of America, of which we have any knowledge. Banished, according to their own history, from their native country, which was situated to the north-west of Mexico, in the year 596 of our era, they proceeded southward under the directions of the chiefs, and after sojourning at various places on the way for the space of one hundred and twenty-four years, arrived at the banks of a river in the vale of Mexico, where they built the city of Tula, the capital of the Toltec kingdom, near the site of the present city of Mexico.

"Their monarchy lasted nearly four centuries, during which they multiplied, extended their population, and built numerous large cities, but direful calamities hung over them. For several years Heaven denied them rain, the earth refused them food; the air, infected with mortal contagion, filled the graves with dead; a great part of the

nation perished of famine or sickness; the last king was among the number, and in the year 1052 the monarchy ended. The wretched remains of the nation took refuge, some in Yucatan, and others in Guatimala, while some lingered around the graves of their kindred in the vale where Mexico was afterwards founded. For a century the land of Anahuac lay waste and depopulated. The Chechemecas, following in the track of their ruined cities, re-occupied them, and afterwards the Acolhuans, the Tlascaltecs, and the Aztecs, which last were the subjects of Montezuma at the time of the invasion by the Spaniards.

"The history of all these tribes or nations is misty, confused, and instinct. The Toltecans, represented to have been the most ancient, are said also, to have been the most polished. Probably they were the originators of that peculiar style of architecture found in Guatimala and Yucatan."

But in identifying the ruined cities of Yucatan, as the works of the ancestors of the present Indians, the cloud which hung over their origin is not removed. We have said that hordes of Indian nations coming from the north, swept at succeeding periods through Mexico, which is the point whose history is most fully known to Europeans. And it appears that the most ancient of these nations, the Toltecans, were the most civilized. Such would have been the conditions, if we suppose migrations of Asiatics to have crossed by Behring's Straits, and been the first to people the New World. The path of this onward tide of human beings would have been from north to south; and their civilization, derived from a source too remote for communication, would naturally be spent in the lapse of ages.

The histories of the eastern and western worlds thus teach us one great lesson. In the elder continents we see the surface of society becoming more refined from age to age, and the mind of each fresh generation enriched by an ever increasing collection of discoveries in the arts and sciences. A mass of knowledge was thus fixed and laid in store for future ages. But the actual condition of the human heart remained the same. The mosaic pavements of the graceful city of Pompeii were trodden by men as morally dark, and as corrupt in appetite, as the crawling denizens of Australian forests. The pictures on the walls of their private apartments, the golden trinkets of their females, their garden-bowers, alike record, in as many impure forms, the utter impotence of mere intellect over the warped heart of man. After an examination of the places and objects, the writer cannot too strongly urge his forced conviction, apart from the multiplied proofs of history, that at the time when the intellectual civilization of the ancient world was at its height, its moral state could not be worse. Here and there a few stern patterns of morality stood out in bold relief from the prevailing darkness. But there was no power within man to preserve his nature from degeneration. Without, there were no purifying principles. Knowledge was being stored for future ages; but nations and societies grew corrupt and perished.

In the western world we have seen that the scattered descendants of the first settlers were unable to maintain even the intellectual heir-loom of the east; their superstitions increased, their power over disease and other natural agents grew weaker; their civilization became blocked up instead of being the living channel of discoveries useful to future generations.

It was not until the renovating force of CHRISTIANITY was brought to bear upon man, that we can find the tone of society improved. But after its establishment, science reached a higher pinnacle from a broader base; and the morals of common life became wholesome. Children still inherited the human tendency towards evil, else where would be the test of comparison? but the restraint of a Christian community subdued their rising passions. Woman, before pandered to for personal charms, and despised on account of her physical weakness and mental inferiority, was now first respected for her moral worth. Nations composed of these elements, grew less perishable. The only instance, that of France, where the bold experiment was tried of doing without the assistance of Christianity, and of falling back once again upon the unassisted strength of reason, ended in shame, discomfiture, and revolting cruelty. While reading about the picturesque remains of Yucatan, let us not forget these nobler lessons!

* See *Saturday Magazine*, Vol. XXI., p. 88.